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ABSTRACT

The group interview, or focused interview, was initially developed in the 1940's to meet certain problems growing out of communications research and propaganda analysis. Designed to determine the response of persons exposed to a situation previously analyzed by the investigator, it was discussed and exemplified as an applied social research technique. This early combination of research method and application has inhibited the use of the group interview in basic social science research to the present day. Whereas the group interview is widely used in market research, psychotherapy, social work, and adult education, it is seldom even briefly mentioned in basic social science textbooks. This study reconsiders the utility of the group interview for basic social science research. Interviews with parents concerning child care decision making provided an appropriate test since all parents interviewed had chosen a child care program for their children from a wider range of culturally acceptable alternatives. Factors such as complexity of the research problem, degree of common experience, degree of prior acquaintanceship, flexibility and pacing of the interviews, group size, number of interviews, and technical considerations are compared and contrasted with available guidelines for using the method as an applied research technique. (Author)

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The Group Interview Reconsidered: Child Care Decision Making

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Introduction

The group interview, or focused interview, was initially developed in the 1940's to meet certain problems growing out of communications research and propaganda analysis. During World War II, such eminent theorists as Robert K. Merton were also involved in applied government research to study the psychological effects of morale-building devices. Research focused on the analysis of responses to particular motion pictures, radio programs, and pamphlets. In the course of this work, the technique of the focused group interview employed was progressively developed to a relatively standardized form (Merton and Kendall, 1946; Merton, Fiske and Kendall, 1956).

An unstructured interview guide was constructed from a prior analysis of a situation in which all of the participants were known to have been involved. The group interview was used to interpret known situational effects by eliciting the subjective experiences of those persons involved rather than relying on post factum interpretations. The goal of the group interview was to elicit a range of responses greater than that which would be obtained from individual interviews. Lewin (1948: 129-139) further distinguished the group interview as an action interview, from a mere fact-finding interview, emphasizing that group discussion brings out a richer, better balanced, and more detailed picture of the situation. Data was used to generate as well as to test hypotheses.

Development of the focused group interview technique very quickly became embroiled in the ongoing controversy over the relative efficacy of quantitative and qualitative research approaches. Paul F. Lazarsfeld (1944) discussed the debate in terms of the complementary nature of the two approaches. Open-ended interviews were designed to obtain rich, detailed descriptions about the range

of characteristics subsumed by a research topic; structured closed-ended sample survey interviews were designed to obtain information about the causes and consequences of variation in predetermined variables of interest. Despite the inherent possibility of complementarity between the two approaches, their application became polarized in actual practice. The ascendancy of the sample survey structured interview not only relegated qualitative approaches in general to a secondary status within the social sciences, but also tended to serve as a model for the unstructured interview. Like the structured interview, unstructured intensive interviews also came to be administered almost exclusively on in individual interviewer-respondent basis. The group interview became primarily identified with the investigation of practical applied research problems where a solution to an empirical problem was being sought. The technique remained as an important tool in the market research situation analogous to the original use to which it was put by Merton and his colleagues.

Use of the technique in psychotherapeutic situations was advanced by the work of Carl Rogers (1951) as his client-centered therapy developed from a method of counseling to an approach to human relationships (Yalom, 1970). From that impetus, it was also picked up by a wide variety of professional educators, college counselors, and ministers as an extension of psychotherapeutic work to children, veterans, industrial workers and other adults who wished psychological help (Lerner and Kelman, 1952).

By the early 1950's, small and primary groups were subjects of observation and discussion in basic social science research, but seldom used scientifically as groups. Group members were commonly interviewed as individuals, and groups were analyzed in terms of intra- and inter-group interaction. The group itself, though, was almost totally ignored with respect to the deliberate interview as a research technique (Thompson and Demerath, 1952: 148).

The current study reconsiders the utility of the group interview for basic social science research. Interviews with parents concerning child care decision making provided an appropriate test since all parents interviewed were known to have been involved in the same particular situation -- that of having chosen a child care program for their children from a wider range of culturally acceptable alternatives. The idea for the project emerged when the senior author's husband decided to investigate child care decision making for a market research class as part of his M.B.A. program rather than the consumer product-oriented topics suggested by his instructors or selected by the other students in his class (O'Connell, 1973).

Research Procedures

The study was conducted to explore the process by which parents decide to have their children cared for on a regular basis by someone in addition to themselves. In order to assure a range of respondents, parents were interviewed whose child care arrangements included: nursery schools, family day care homes, day care centers operated by voluntary associations, day care centers operated by the local community, and residential centers operated by the state. All of the child care programs through which parents were contacted serve the city of Evanston, Illinois which is located just north of Chicago and has a population of approximately 80,000 people.

Each of the interviews, except for one, was conducted with a group of parents whose children all attended the same center. In each of the groups, all of the parents interviewed had had the common experience of choosing the

same child care program for their children. For this reason, the group interview was believed to be an appropriate method of generating hypotheses concerning the process by which parents make decisions about their children's care. In addition, because several individuals can be sampled in one interview, group interviews were more economical than individual interviews in terms of cost and especially in terms of time expended.

Respondent Selection

Interviews with parents were set up through various procedures depending on the particular center involved. Some of the center directors were first informed of our research through a presentation made at a board of directors meeting of the Evanston Committee for Community Coordinated Child Care. This organization is a multi-site, multi-funding agency which channels certain federal, state, and local funds and provides support services to a variety of child care programs in Evanston. As a result of this funding from government sources, the Committee is able to supplement the cost of care for children of low income families, thereby enabling parents to choose the program they would like their children to attend. All child care programs associate with the Committee enroll guideline or scholarship children whose families pay none of the cost of their care, children whose families pay part of the cost based on a sliding-fee system, and children whose families pay for the entire cost of the service.

Other program directors were contacted and informed of our research through telephone contacts made by our staff. This was the case when the program was not associated with the Evanston Committee for Community Coordinated Child Care or when the program director was someone with whom we had established contact during previous work.

A variety of procedures were involved in the selection of the parents to be interviewed. One center required that its parent board approve our project; another required the approval of its board of directors. Some program directors provided us with names of parents that had agreed to participate in our study. One director supplied us with names of parents who we later telephoned and requested their participation. The director at one shcool referred us to the president of the school's parent-teacher association. The president of this association then contacted other parents who she knew well and requested their participation.

In most cases, though, after obtaining the support of the director, each of the parents at the center was sent (usually by way of their children) a letter explaining our project and an expression-of-interest form. Parents interested in participating in the interviews could sign the form and return it to the director of their children's center. The names and telephone numbers of interested parents were then given to us, and we contacted them in order to set up a date and time for the group interview.

Thus, the sample is self-selected and non-probability and is probably biased in favor of parents who are more actively involved in their children's care. Child care is becoming a more culturally acceptable alternative to having one parent remain home with young children on a full-time basis, and for this reason, these more sophisticated respondents are believed to be perhaps more indicative of future consumer preferences than would be the case with a probability sample.

Parents were interviewed in groups of two to five persons during a six-week period in the summer of 1976. Twelve group interviews were conducted involving forty-two people: 29 white females, 6 black females, 5 white males, and 2 black

males. The sample included single as well as married parents, adoptive as well as biological parents, parents of children with handicapping conditions as well as parents of normal children, and interracial as well as homogeneous marriages. One of the participants was a grandmother. Their ages ranged from 21 to 50 years, education from high school graduates to Ph.D.'s, and family incomes before taxes from $6,000 to over $25,000 per year. Approximately half of the respondents identified themselves as Protestants; the remainder included approximately equal numbers of Jewish and Roman Catholic respondents. Over two-thirds of the respondents described themselves as politically liberal. Occupations included: counselor, clerical worker, editor of a journal, high school teacher, housewife, nurse, pediatrician, secretary, speech pathologist, student, supervisor in a manufacturing plant, and university professor. Cost of a single child's care paid for by the family ranged from nothing to $52.00 per week, with the median cost per week paid by the family being $30.00. Although the sample is probably biased in favor of respondents exhibiting more sophisticated consumer preferences, the range of respondent characteristics indicates that the sample is not one of a culturally or economically homogeneous group.

Opening the Interview

Participants in each of the interviews were brought together in informal settings. Except for one interview which was held in a small auditorium, all of the interviews were conducted in living room-like settings. Most of these interviews were held in lounges located in college buildings. In most cases, the staff member who had contacted the parents in order to set up the interview was present at the interview to record the conversation of the participants.

As participants arrived at the interview, this person was able to greet the parents as they entered the room and introduce them to the rest of the group. Thus, participants were made to feel more a part of the group through their prior contact with our staff member as well as through their introduction to the other parents. In many cases, though, the participants, because their children attended the same center, had had some, if not extensive, contact with the other participants. Comments like, "Oh, you must be Cindy's mother." were common.

A relaxed atmosphere was further encouraged by explaining more fully the nature of the research project. The interviewer described the research project to the participants and mentioned the general questions that would be asked. These questions covered how the parents decided to have their children cared for on a regular basis by someone in addition to themselves, what factors entered into the decision to select their children's current arrangement, their feelings about the arrangements made, and their involvement in the programs. Parents were encouraged to talk to each other as well as to the interviewer. This interaction between parents was believed to assist in recalling past events and the factors influencing the parents' decisions.

Before starting the interview, participants were asked to sign a Human Subjects Consent Form. The consent form, required by the University's Human Subjects Review Committee, included a brief description of the kinds of questions that would be asked during the group interview, the names of the project director and the sponsoring institution, and a guarantee of anonymity and confidentiality. In addition, a statement concerming the participant's right to refuse to answer any question or to leave the interview at any time was included. All of the parents agreed to sign the form.

Before the interview began, participants were also asked if there would be any objection to our recording the interview. None of the participants expressed any objection, and we feel that because participants' responses to questions were given with spontaneity and depth that using the tape recorder did not hinder parents from responding more fully than they would have done otherwise.

Prior to asking the more broad and abstract questions concerning parents' decision-making, parents were initially asked the ages of their children at the time they were first cared for outside the home. Through these kinds of initial questions which could be easily answered, participants' apprehensions were lessened.

The unstructured group interview technique, utilizing a series of open-ended questions to guide the conversation, was selected due to its advantage for eliciting detailed material about the characteristics of and variations in these decision-making patterns. As parents talk to each other as well as to the interviewer, the flexibility of the format enabled the contingencies that linked the factors in the decision-making process to be established. Due to the complexity of parents' consumer behaviors and decisions, an unstructured interview with open-ended questions was necessary to determining the many factors which entered into the decision-making process.

Utility of the Group Interview for Exploratory Research

Complexity of the Research Problem

In utilizing the technique of group interviewing for market research, there is a specific topic for discussion. "In the group situation a person is asked an opinion about something -- a product, a distribution system, an advertisement, a

television program, or perhaps a candidate for office" (Goldman 1962: 61). Similarly, in utilizing the group format in education, social work, or therapy there is a defined goal towards which everyone in the group is presumably oriented. There is no consideration of how group members came to value the generic end product -- consumer goods and material possessions, health, education, a democratic system of government. These values are assumed, and the discussion focuses upon how decisions are made amongst the various options that could achieve the desired end product. In contrast, our study was concerned not merely with the consumer decision of how parents select particular child care programs from a variety of options, but also with how parents decided to select child care as an alternative in the first place. In other words, we were concerned with how parents came to select a non-traditional value (child care on a regular basis by someone other than the parents) over a traditional value (child care by the mother in the home).

Given the fact that child care arrangements outside the home are not yet institutionalized as the natural, normal, or even the most frequently occurring choice, we were interested in obtaining relatively complex life histories of value clarification, justification, and experimentation. Children are "dynamic", not static, objects as are consumer goods. As children progress through different developmental stages and as siblings enter to make family processes more complex, the family life cycle changes correspondingly. Decisions are relative to these growth and maturation processes. They involve complex attitudes about family roles and perceptions of how these roles should be enacted, by family members, friends, and the society in general. Knowledge of alternatives is often quite limited due to the fact that non-mainstream options are not widely advertised or experienced. Family, friendship, and neighborhood networks are not necessarily

helpful and may even be a hindrance. Whereas everyone might agree that driving a car is desirable and discussion would center over the particular make and model most desirable given financial constraints, there is less likelihood that there would be agreement on the desirability of purchasing child care services.

Degree of Common Experience

Knowing that the history of the decision-making process would be idiosyncratic to the particular life circumstances of each family, a common basis for obtaining the retrospective life histories was established by bringing together parents who had ultimately selected the same child care program for their children. ... literature on the utility of the group interview for applied research stresses the importance of achieving both homogeneity and contrast within specific groups. "In marketing research, homogeneity is particularly desirable with respect to social class and stage in the family life cycle" (Wells, 1974: 2-136). The major reason for stressing homogeneity in these areas is to ensure a group who would be comfortable interacting in a variety of social situations. As Goldman (1962: 62) elaborates:

> A number of individuals may be very different in national origin, religious beliefs, political persuasion, and the like; but if they share a common identity relevant to the discussion (shoe buyers, drug manufacturers, purchasers of luxury items), a group can form. This involves some risks that can be minimized by thoughtful selection of group members. For example, in a discussion of a home-decorating product, the inclusion of one or two low-income people in a group of wealthy individuals may serve to inhibit the free expression of the attitudes of all.

The relevant dimension, however, is not so much income, age, or status as it is the extent to which these characteristics would inhibit people from expressing themselves freely (Merton, Fiske and Kendall, 1956). As Thompson and Demerath

(1952: 152) found in a study of Air Force personnel, the distinction between bureaucratic status classes -- between those who were commissioned and those who were not -- was highly visible and reinforced by the structure of the social system. On the other hand, a crew comprised of both commissioned and non-commissioned personnel was an important frame of reference under other conditions. What was necessary was to ensure that the questions were specifically applicable and clearly pertinent to the particular group being interviewed -- officers, airmen, or crew. The goals of the group interview are to maximize communication by enabling the development of mutual understanding, to reduce feelings of uncertainty or inadequacy which would lead individuals to try to conceal from the group "how little they know", and to accelerate the process whereby group members feel secure enough to express their candid attitudes and experiences (Gordon, 1951).

In our study we hypothesized that values about appropriate programs for the care of young children were the important frame of reference. Standardizing this frame of reference, we believed, would enable group members to communicate across status boundaries. This belief was based upon our knowledge that the child care delivery system in Evanston is coordinated throughout the community. Federal and state funding for low-income families is channelled through a resource and referral center which then purchases care for low-income "guideline" children in a variety of programs. This multi-funding multi-site delivery system arrangement results in children from low and high-income families being served by the same program. Both low-and-high-income families have the ability to select the type of program desired for their children freed from cost-of-care considerations. Values concerning the type of care desired take priority over socioeconomic status considerations. For

example, programs vary in the extent to which they stress a family-like versus an educational program. The common basis for families with children in particular child care programs was their belief in the appropriate care for young children's needs. Our findings supported our hypothesis. With this common basis established, differences in income, education, age, or marital status did not inhibit a free expression of parents' experiences.

In our study what was relevant to establishing rapport was not the social background of the parents but the extent to which the program selected maximized one of two sets of values regarded as paramount for the care of young children. One of the sets of values concerned the amount of time considered appropriate for children to be cared for in a group setting outside the home, a three-hour nursery school program or a ten-hour day care program. The second set of values concerned the philosophical orientation of the program chosen, primarily that between an emphasis on cognitive versus social skills. When the participants' values differed on just one of these two dimensions, communication was not inhibited. For example, some of the groups contained parents whose children were in nursery school and parents whose children were in day care within the same program. They expressed a great deal of interest in finding out about the effects of a differential amount of exposure to the same program.

Scheduling difficulties resulted in two interviews being conducted with parents whose children were not in the same programs. In one of the interviews all of the children were in day care arrangements; in the second some were in nursery school and some in day care arrangements. These interviews provided an additional test for our hypothesis that maximizing either one of the two sets of values was sufficient to establish rapport. In the interview where all of the children were in day care arrangements, the parents communicated freely with each

other. All the mothers were employed full-time, had experienced similar negative reactions from some significant others concerning this decision, and were interested in the fact that others in the same situation would have different philosophical orientations about how children should then be cared for. In the interview where some of the children were in nursery school programs and some in different day care programs there was no common frame of reference established. The non-employed mothers of nursery school children also had different philosophical values than did the employed mothers of day care children. They neither agreed upon the appropriate role of mothers in the society nor upon the appropriate type of care for young children. There was little spontaneous discussion between parents as the interview progressed and it became a situation wherein each of the participants gave individual responses directed to the interviewer's questions.

Degree of Prior Acquaintanceship

Researchers who have used the group interview for applied research goals have noted that there are both liabilities and assets to interviewing participants who are personal friends. Communication may be facilitated because friends feel more comfortable with each other (Bogardus, 1926: 379). On the other hand, if the group includes both friends and others who are not acquainted, the participants who are friends may tend to dominate, leaving the others out of their conversation. Also, friends may be less candid with each other or tend to avoid topics which would cause friction, thus resulting in an artificial homogeneity of opinion (Wells, 1974: 2-137).

In our study the degree of prior acquaintanceship of the participants ranged from groups which included couples, close personal friends, and people who were meeting each other for the first time. No group included only couples, and only two of the groups consisted entirely of participants who were all members of a pre-existing friendship network. The majority of the groups consisted of a mixture of people who knew each other beforehand and people who were meeting each other for the first time. No differences in amount of participation or discussion of the full range of questions asked were evident as a result of prior personal involvement. We believe this was due to the fact that for the most part the participants knew about each other through their children even though they had never actually met. There was a desire to get to know each other, or to get to know each other better, through the exchange of information the interview made possible. They seemed to feel that the shared experience of the interview would add a new dimension to the common experience which their children shared. This inference was supported by the comments made by many parents after the interview was over that they wished more such opportunities could be available.

Flexibility and Pacing of the Interview

The group interview has a wide variety of connotations ranging from a direct question-and-answer approach (Goldman, 1962) to that of a nondirective moderator who participates only enough to get a conversation started and to keep the conversation relevant to the purpose of the interview (Rogers, 1945). The interview schedule developed for our study consisted of five-pages of open-ended questions. These questions were arranged in terms of five general content areas: decision to have children cared for outside the home on a regular basis,

decision to have children attend the present child care program, satisfactions and dissatisfactions with the present arrangement, type of social environment desired for children, and extent of parents' involvement in the child care program. Each content area was introduced with a general statement about the subject matter of the following questions, for example, "First we would like to talk to you, and have you talk to each other, about how you decided to have your children cared for by someone in addition to yourselves outside your own homes on a regular basis." In many of the groups, this general statement was sufficient for participants to commence a detailed reconstruction of their decision-making processes. At one extreme, the interviewer did little more than introduce the five content areas in this fashion, acting primarily as a moderator. At the other extreme, the interviewer had to ask nearly every question on the schedule to elicit the same information. In general, if one person in the group began by responding spontaneously in depth, the remainder of the participants would follow in a like manner. In other instances, the participants' internalized expectations of what an "interview" should be seemed to inhibit freedom of expression, despite repeated probes to elicit more elaborated responses. That this was the case was suggested in the more spontaneous interviews when at some point one of the participants would invariably interrupt the conversation to ask anxiously if it "was all right if we talk so much." Upon reassurance that this was indeed the purpose of bringing them together in a group rather than interviewing each of them individually, the participants tended to relax and continue with their elaborated discussion.

Group Size

In determining group size, it is necessary to strike a balance such that the group is small enough that everyone has an opportunity to participate but large enough so that a variety of views will be expressed for mutual stimulation. In market research, the optimal size has been suggested as being between six and ten participants (Wells, 1974: 2-137). In utilizing the group interview to evaluate educational programs, the optimal group size is regarded as being between six and eight participants, although "as many as ten or twelve can be handled by one who has had considerable experience in group interviewing on a given topic" (Edmiston, 1944: 593). In psychotherapy, the optimal group size is regarded as being between five to eight participants (Frank, 1952: 38; Hobbs, 1951: 293). These figures suggested to us that as the degree of complexity of the subject matter increased, the optimal group size would become smaller. We began contacting potential participants with the goal of obtaining six participants for each of the group interviews. Due to the fact that the interviews were conducted within a relatively short period of time and conflicted with many persons' summer vacation schedules, the actual group sizes varied between two to five participants. Of the twelve interviews, four were conducted with five participants in each, one with four participants, four with three participants, and three with two participants.

Another factor influencing the group size regarded as optimal is the method of recording. The number of participants should be large enough to generate a continuous dialogue but small enough to ensure accurate records. Five participants in the group interview was found to be too many, even though the interview was

recorded on tape and two human recorders were present in addition to the interviewer. Because we were dealing with complex life histories, it was necessary for participants to discuss their individual experiences at some length. In the larger groups, this appeared to become quite frustrating to the other participants who were eager to discuss their own situations with the group, also. This resulted in discussion breaking down into two sub-groupings. The human recorders, sitting outside the circle of participants, had difficulty obtaining accurate records, and the tape was illegible as well. In addition, these larger group interviews tended to extend beyond the two-hour time limit expected.

At the other extreme, two participants was found to be too small in one of the three interviews conducted with this number. In that interview, both of the participants tended to be reticent, and the discussion did not flow spontaneously. For these reasons, it was found that three to four participants was the optimal group size given the complexity of our research topic.

Number of Interviews

In marketing research "reports are often written after three or four sessions, and it is a rare study indeed that requires more than eleven or twelve" (Wells, 1974: 2-138). Given an optimal group size for marketing research of six to ten participants, this would result in information being obtained from eighteen to forty individuals after three or four sessions. This compares very closely to the number of individuals interviewed (twenty to fifty) when an unstructured intensive interviewing format is utilized by social scientists in basic research (Lofland, 1971: 91). For basic research purposes, the additional qualitative stipulation is usually added that the

researcher should conduct enough interviews so that no new information is resulting from the interviews and then conduct a few additional interviews as a safeguard against premature closure.

Forty-two individuals participated in our twelve group interviews. Each interview resulted in some substantially new information about decision-making processes. Given the range of child care programs that had been selected, from three-hour per day nursery school programs to full-time residential care for the developmentally disabled, more interviews would be necessary to ensure that the characteristics of child care decision making were adequately documented. An alternative strategy for future studies would be to limit the range of programs under consideration.

Some Technical Considerations

The Interview Situation

Group interviews can be conducted in a variety of situations, varied according to location and time. In marketing research, the selection of neutral office or community building greatly simplifies the problem of setting up recording equipment, but decreases the probability that the participants will all attend. Conversely, the selection of one of the participants' homes as the site for the interview increases the probability of attendance but also increases technical difficulties (Wells, 1974: 2-137). In utilizing the group interview format for research involving the United States Air Force, Thompson and Demerath (1952: 153) found that the time at which the interview was conducted was an additional important consideration. Considering the alternative of interviewing during work or leisure periods:

> When duties were not pressing or when their work was boring to group members, it seemed that interviews during duty hours produced leisurely, extended discussions; whereas interviews which called men away from interesting tasks or which might require them to work overtime did not elicit the full cooperation needed. The same holds for leisure-time interviews. When the crews were overseas on temporary duty assignments which required that they leave families behind, they frequently found leisure time boring and in such cases were quite willing to be interviewed off-duty. However, at their home base, many were eager to leave the base at quitting time and return to their homes, and group and individual interviews tended to be hurried.

Since we were unsure what the optimal site and time would be for our participants, we elicited this information from them when the initial contact was made. Technical considerations were not an issue since our only equipment was a single tape recorder. Eleven of the twelve interviews were conducted in informal settings: eight in the living room of a residential college at Northwestern University, one in the living room of a family day care home provider, and two in staff lounges at the child care program site. The twelfth interview was conducted around a conference table in a small auditorium. Attendance and participation did not appear to be affected by the location of the interview, however, participants in the formal auditorium setting reduced their feelings of dissonance by making jokes about its austerity. Refreshments were served at each interview to contribute to the informality of the setting.

Nine of the interviews were held in the evening, two in the late afternoon, and one in the morning. Scheduling the interview during working hours precludes the participation of working parents. Scheduling the interview during the late afternoon, at the time when children are picked up from the program, generally limited participation to only one parent from two-parent families. Hours of work do not necessarily coincide in two-parent families, and the parent who is off work first generally makes the pick up. In addition, the

childrens' schedules were disrupted when they had to remain in child care for an extended time while their parents participated in the interview. For these reasons, the evening schedule was preferable. On the other hand, interviews held in the evening encountered greater scheduling problems because of participants' potential involvement in regularly scheduled evening activities. Child care was provided during all the interviews.

Equipment

Because the interviews were held in informal settings, there was no control over the noise level from extraneous sources. Our tapes were occasionally obliterated by air conditioners, the noise from street traffic, the "El" train, and music or the ringing of the telephone from adjacent rooms. With group size larger than two participants, a human recorder was unable to obtain an accurate record of the dialogue. The use of two human recorders in addition to the tape recorder provided safeguards against all these contingencies. Before the interview began,the recorders agreed between themselves which half of the participants each would focus on to obtain a complete record. They situated themselves outside the circle of participants, on opposite sides. Post-interview discussions between the interviewer and the recorders also facilitated analysis of the group dynamics.

Interruptions

A disadvantage of conducting the interviews in informal settings is the difficulty in preventing interruptions. This became a problem on two occasions. In one instance, a child insisted on staying with his mother during the interview rather than participating in the child care arrangement, and the mother acquiesced. In the second instance, an adult wandered into the room and started

asking a series of questions about what the group was doing. In general, such interruptions will probably have to be handled as tactfully as possible on an individual basis, but the researcher should be cautioned that it is an inherent disadvantage of maximizing the informality of the setting.

Scheduling

Group interviews are obviously more complex in terms of scheduling than are individual unstructured intensive interviews, not only in terms of selecting a convenient time and location, but also because any one of the participants may arrive late or have to leave early. Time of arrival was a chronic problem, with the earliest participant generally arriving ten to fifteen minutes before the interview was scheduled to begin and the latest participant not arriving until ten or fifteen minutes after the scheduled starting time. All of the interviews were started ten to fifteen minutes late. Since one or more of the participants may have been waiting for twenty to thirty minutes by this time, the interviewer (and recorders) should be prepared to discuss some interesting but nonrelated topic during this waiting period. We achieved this by discussing our general research interests with them.

The problem of someone having to leave early only occurred on two occasions, and in neither case was the ensuing conversation disrupted amongst the remainder of the participants. On the contrary, participants generally remained for a time after the interview was formally concluded. Additional information relevant to the interview was often obtained during the post-interview discussion. This information was not qualitatively different from that discussed during the formal interview schedule. That is, it did not have the characteristic of the "false termination" discussed by Goldman (1962: 65) as utilized in psychotherapy and market research:

> It is a rule of thumb in group psychotherapy that the most important material may be produced in the last few minutes of the session. In this way the person who would like to contribute something thay may be embarrassing or threatening to him has only a few minutes during which he must endure the discomfort. Also, he may deliberately inhibit ideas that he feels are irrelevant to the discussion proper.
>
> Following this lead, especially in group interviews in which emotionally loaded material is involved, the session is "terminated" early by thanking the group members for being there and inquiring as to whether there are any other comments. Intensive probing into these "final" comments has been rewarding on a number of occasions.

Following the termination of the formal interview, each of the participants was handed a single sheet requesting basic demographic information on age, education, religion, political attitudes, family and mother's income, and cost of the child's care borne by the family. These sheets were completed anonymously because it was felt that this information would be considered too private for group discussion. After the demographic profile sheets were completed, participants would often offer additional comments that amplified or clarified earlier discussions. The most reasonable interpretation seems to be that the participants withheld some details of their experiences out of politeness, so that they did not dominate the discussion and so that the interview could proceed at a reasonable rate toward completion. However, after the interview was formally concluded, they felt freer to elaborate previous generalizations, knowing that we would be interested in the additional information, while at the same time not restricting the leave-taking of the other participants. When one person offered such further elaboration, frequently others would join in with additional comments of their own. In the most extreme case, the post-interview discussion continued for a full forty-five minutes after the formal termination. Since the interview had been formally terminated, the human recorders were frequently brought into the discussion, and it would have disrupted the spontaneity

of expression had they resumed note taking. By this time, the participants were unaware of the tape recorder which was still turned on. The tapes plus our own recall enabled us to accurately record most of this information. However, in a couple of instances, the tape ran out shortly after the interview had been formally terminated. It would have been disruptive to make the act of turning the tape over overtly. In these instances, we pooled our abilities of recall to record the conversation as accurately as possible, but of course much of the detail was lost. In later sessions, we took the precaution of ensuring that there would always be at least a half hour of tape remaining after the formal termination of the interview.

Transcribing the Interviews

Unlike the market research situation where the researcher is often able to prepare a summary of the principal findings directly from the tapes and from recall, or the psychoanalytic situation where the analyst fits the respondents' responses directly into a more general theoretical scheme for the written case records, our research necessitated what Wells (1974: 2-143) refers to as the "Scissor and Sort" or "Long Couch, Short Hallway" technique. That is, all the interviews were completely transcribed before analysis was undertaken. One of the human recorders took the responsibility for the transcription, utilizing recall and the two sets of handwritten records as back-up when the tape became unintelligible. Such complete and accurate transcripts are essential when the research is of a partially exploratory nature and when the information is to be utilized for the development of analytic categories as well as for testing the adequacy of the conceptualization that informed the original design of the interview schedule.

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